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Pluricentric languages[1]

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1. Introduction

Many languages are *pluricentric* in nature, i.e. they exist as a national or official language in more than one nation. They range from languages diffused widely across different continents, such as English or Spanish, to languages predominantly used in neighbouring countries, such as Dutch or Swedish. In the following we introduce readers to both foundational and more recent research of pluricentric languages, as well as current debates in the field. While the first attempts to describe the conditions typical of pluricentric languages appeared in the 1960s, it took until the 1980s for the field to establish itself, through theoretical as well as empirical accounts of pluricentricity. From early on, there have been accounts of the power relationships between different varieties of pluricentric languages, in particular with regard to power asymmetries between national varieties, often expressed as dominant versus non-dominant varieties. Among other things, this has resulted in extensive research into the varying status of non-dominant national, or sub-national, varieties, an endeavour which also draws attention to language ideologies and linguistic rights of national (and other) varieties of pluricentric languages. A related issue here concerns whether the description primarily should follow national borders or concern regional variation within a language, often subsumed under the headings pluricentricity and pluriareality respectively.

Parallel to such theoretically motivated inquiry, there has been substantial empirical research from the outset. The early, foundational work in the field was primarily concerned with the description of linguistic structural differences, such as phonological, morphological or lexical variation between varieties of pluricentric languages. This interest has hardly abated, but it has been complemented by other perspectives in more recent years. In particular, there has been an increasing emphasis on pragmatic and interactional variation. The shift in interest to include pragmatic variation can to a large extent be credited to work within the field *variational pragmatics* where pluricentricity is treated as a case of regional variation. While studies in variational pragmatics have explored micro-pragmatic variation, based on both experimental and actual discourse, more recently others have focused on the sequentiality of authentic interactional data from the perspective of conversation analysis and interactional linguistics. Even though some methodological differences exist between variational pragmatics and the interactional paradigm, they also have much in common and there has been cross-fruition between the two.

The article is organised as follows. Section 2, gives an account of research into the relationships that exist between varieties of pluricentric languages, introducing central concepts and theoretical underpinnings of pluricentric research, covering power relationships, expression of identities and attitudes as well as the debate on pluricentricity vis-à-vis pluriareality. In section 3, we turn to the foundational work in the field, in particular concerning linguistic structural differences between varieties. In section 4 we describe work on pragmatic variation, and in section 5 interactional variation in pluricentric languages is addressed. Finally, section 6 offers a conclusion and outlook followed by a bibliography.

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2. Relationships between varieties of pluricentric languages

Central concepts

The scholarly interest in pluricentric languages can be traced to the work by the sociolinguist William Stewart who launched the terms *monocentric* and *polycentric* for describing national multilingualism in the 1960s (Stewart 1968). In particular, he used these terms to describe the different paths of standardisation of a language. In the monocentric case, there is a single set of universally accepted norms and any variation in use is downplayed whereas in the polycentric case different sets of norms exist concurrently and may undergo separate codification. Polycentric standardisation in Stewart's sense may involve codification of variation within a nation, or refer to the variant use of the same language in different nations. In the latter case, the standardisation is either *endonormative*, i.e. based on models of use within the nation in question, or *exonormative*, i.e. modelled on the use in other nations.

Stewart used *polycentric*[2] to refer to standard varieties of a particular language both within a nation as well as in different nations. Similarly, Ulrich Ammon refers broadly to a language with more than one centre as pluricentric (1995: 97), including national as well as sub-national, regional centres of a language. However, most research to date has focused on differences between standard varieties of pluricentric languages used in separate nations. Michael Clyne, with reference to Kloss (1978 II: 66-67), defines a pluricentric language as one that has "several interacting centres, each providing a national variety with at least some of its own (codified) norms" (1992: 1). As pointed out by Peter Auer (2014: 19), much of the research interest in pluricentric languages has thus concerned structures associated with normatively installed national standard varieties, leaving out any actual variation in language use which is not recognised as part of the codified national standard norm in a political entity.

Power relationships: dominance and non-dominance

In research on pluricentric languages it is common to differentiate between *dominant* and *non-dominant varieties*, a distinction which captures the asymmetrical power relationships which almost invariably exist between different national varieties of a pluricentric language. In other words, there is a certain "pecking order" (Clyne 1992b: 455) where dominant varieties exert much more influence over non-dominant varieties than vice versa, both in terms of language structure and attitudes. The power imbalances are also inscribed in the different treatment of the national centres: national centres of dominant varieties have often been taken as core areas whereas national centres of non-dominant varieties have been seen as more peripheral. All national standard varieties have some of their own norms; but dominant varieties take the lead as primary norm-setting centres, while non-dominant varieties are secondary norm-setting centres further underscoring asymmetries of power.

Factors that signal power relationships include: the relative population size of the nations involved; their respective economic and political power; their historical role as a core or peripheral area; their position as an official language (*de jure* or *de facto*) or as a regional or minority language without official recognition, and, finally, whether it is a native or a nativized[3] variety of the nation (Clyne 1992 ibid., see also Muhr 2012a: 26ff.). Accordingly, a

[2] The term *polycentric* was used in earlier work to describe a language with more than one centre, but has since largely been replaced by *pluricentric* – a term introduced by Michael Clyne in the 1980s in his work on varieties of English (Australian English) and German (Austrian German).

[3] *Nativized variety* is used for referring to a variety of a language which has been introduced into a community (e.g. as an official language or co-official language) through colonisation or immigration, and over time acquired native speakers.

dominant variety is typically the language of the majority population of a nation, and therefore it also tends to be a variety with a large number of speakers. Non-dominant varieties, on the other hand, may be spoken by a numerical minority within a nation, as is the case with Swedish in Finland: Swedish is a national, official language in Finland, alongside Finnish, but it is the first language of only about 5% of Finland's population. Compared to Swedish in Sweden, spoken by some 85% of the population as a first language, Finland-Swedish then is the non-dominant national variety of Swedish.

An investigation into non-dominant varieties brings to the fore issues of language policy and planning. The division into *status planning* (selection and implementation of a specific variety for official, public use) and *corpus planning* (codification and functional elaboration in new domains) associated with the work by Einar Haugen in particular (e.g. Haugen 1983) is useful for describing the relative vitality of a variety. Rudolf Muhr (2012a: 32–35) suggests a list of eight stages of pluricentricity at different levels of development. At one extreme end we find languages with varieties that have no territory of their own and which lack any official recognition through status or corpus planning. Muhr illustrates this fragile, incipient stage of pluricentricity with West-Armenian, a variety linguistically distinct from East Armenian: there is a large diaspora of Armenians dispersed into several countries through migration, but their language lacks recognition in the receiving countries. Steps 2–4 all involve restrictions on the acceptance of pluricentricity, from varieties with no recognition as all (e.g. Russian in the Baltic states), to those lacking appropriate status as a state or regional language (e.g. Hungarian in Slovakia, Romania or Serbia), or those being denied pluricentric status by the dominant variety (characteristic of languages with a high level of centralisation, e.g. French or Italian). The critical dividing line goes between steps 4 and 5: from step 5 onwards, "the pluricentric status and the national norm of a variety is *acknowledged and accepted by the language communities*, and serves as a *means of identity building* (p. 34, emphasis in original) resulting in the codification and promotion of national norms.

Problematic hierarchies

The division of national varieties into a binary dichotomy of dominant or non-dominant does however not capture the nature of pluricentricity fully. Ulrich Ammon suggests that a pluricentric language may display different degrees of symmetry (1989: 91). Based on whether a national standard variety takes its models and rules from within the nation (endonormativity), or from outside the nation (exonormativity) Ammon distinguishes four types of national centres: *full centres*, *nearly full centres*, *semi centres* and *rudimentary centres*. A full centre displays full endonormativity and a rudimentary centre full exonormativity with the other two representing positions in-between. While this may be helpful for identifying levels of (a)symmetrical relationships between national varieties, the description of different types of centres is still hierarchical in nature, and indeed the word 'centre' suggests that a periphery exists as well.

English provides an illustration of a language with degrees of asymmetrical relationships between its national varieties. As a colonial language English spread world-wide from England of course, but it would make little sense to consider British English as the sole dominant variety today, or Britain as the core area (c.f. Leitner 1992: 207). Applied to English, both Britain and the United States are full centres in Ammon's sense, displaying fairly symmetrical relationships, while nativized varieties, e.g. Indian English or Singapore English, are the least dominant, with other national varieties, such as Australian, New Zealand and South African English, somewhere in-between. However, power relationships between different national varieties are not static, but may change over time due to economic, political and demographic changes. Take for instance standard Australian English, a national variety which has gained internal and external acceptance leading to increased prestige despite its

numerical and economic relative insignificance on the world scene. To a large extent, this has been achieved through intensive codification, aided also by overseas marketing of Australia as a destination for travel and higher education. Kretzenbacher (2012) draws our attention to the fact that national standard varieties may be dominant and non-dominant at the same time, and cites Australian standard English which has a dominant role in the Pacific region while it is non-dominant in relation to e.g. American English. Furthermore, English also stands out through its role as the global lingua franca (ELF) for international communication – providing a super-national variety of sorts and further complicating a binary dominance/non-dominance model.

Pluricentric languages and identity

Yet another dimension of pluricentricity concerns the role a variety has for expressing national, ethnic and cultural identities. In his ground-breaking work on pluricentric languages Michael Clyne makes the point that "[p]luricentric languages are both unifiers and dividers of peoples. They unify people through the use of language and separate them through the development of national norms and indices and linguistic variables with which the speakers identify" (Clyne 1992a: 1). Arguably, any language – monocentric or pluricentric – serves such identity purposes, but in the case of a pluricentric language where the linguistic distance between the national standard varieties is comparatively negligible, the identity function becomes particularly salient.

On the one hand, a national variety needs enough unique linguistic and/or pragmatic characteristics for it to be understood as a separate variety; on the other hand, it needs to share enough features with other varieties to be perceived as part of the same language. Accordingly, a pluricentric language with at least two varieties is a development based on the *Ausbau*[4] principle where even slight differences, e.g. in pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar or spelling serve as symbols of shared national/cultural identity, while at the same time marking difference to other national varieties.

For political and ideological reasons, even minor linguistic differences between varieties can be the target for codification and standardisation in order to maximize distance between national varieties. Sometimes such a process is the first stage towards a separate language. The (ongoing) development of Serbo-Croatian into two separate languages in the wake of the collapse of Yugoslavia and the ensuing formation of new nation states serves as a relatively recent illustration of an ideologically and politically driven differentiation process. On purely linguistic grounds Serbian and Croatian are (still) mutually intelligible varieties, but of course, through continued differentiation they may well cease to be so. A parallel, but less frequently cited example, is Meänkieli, a variety of Finnish spoken in the Torne Valley of the border region between Finland and Sweden. In Sweden, Finnish and Meänkieli are both recognised as minority languages with regional official status (Hyltenstam 1999) while the closely related varieties of Meänkieli spoken in the Torne Valley in Finland are seen as dialects of Finnish (Vaattovaara 2012).

Attitudes and perceptions

A further dimension of the asymmetrical relationships between national varieties concerns speaker attitudes and perceptions. For instance, speakers of dominant varieties have been found to show less interest in, and have poorer knowledge of, non-dominant varieties than vice versa, or to be ignorant of their existence altogether (Clyne 1992b: 460). In turn, this

[4] Kloss (1967) coined the term *Ausbau languages* for related languages made different by functional development (e.g. Danish and Swedish) in contrast to *Abstand languages* that are linguistically unrelated languages (e.g. Finnish and Swedish).

behaviour is linked to the inclination among members of dominant nations to view their own national variety as *the* standard, while they may regard other national standard varieties as "deviant, non-standard and exotic, cute, charming and somewhat archaic" (Clyne 1992b: 459). Awareness of characteristics of the dominant variety is also generally much greater than for other varieties. For example, Clyne, Norrby & Warren found that the participants they interviewed from Finland generally displayed much greater knowledge of linguistic and cultural features associated with Sweden than vice versa: only 3% of Finland-Swedish participants claimed to lack such awareness whereas as many as 40% of participants from Sweden claimed to be ignorant of Finland Swedish (2009:145–6).

Speakers of dominant varieties also sometimes confuse national variation with regional variation, showing little understanding of the identity function and symbolic power other national varieties have for their users. Speakers of dominant varieties may also believe that linguistic diversity exists only in spoken language, but not in the written standard (Clyne 1992b: 460). At the same time, speakers of non-dominant national varieties may converge towards the dominant national variety in intercultural settings when communicating with members of dominant national varieties, whereas the opposite is rarely the case. This further underscores the norm-setting prerogative of dominant varieties. They also tend to have more resources at hand for the dissemination of their national standard varieties – through extensive codification in grammars and dictionaries, the production of materials for foreign language teaching programmes overseas, or simply by being more globally available for large audiences through electronic and print media (Clyne 1992b: 459–460). Rudolf Muhr adds to the list of characteristics that linguistic change in the dominant variety is seen as a natural process, eventually leading to codification, while change initiated in non-dominant varieties is "more or less seen as secessionist and a danger to the unity of the language" (Muhr 2012a: 29). In turn, such behaviour has been associated with a monocentric view, typical of dominant varieties, whose speakers tend to regard themselves as the true custodians of the correct norm and their nation as the true home of the language (Muhr ibid. p. 27).

Pluricentricity or pluriareality

Yet another question in research on pluricentric languages concerns whether the documented linguistic variation is best described from a pluri-*centric* or a pluri-*areal* perspective. A pluricentric perspective emphasises variation between different national standard varieties of a language, whereas a pluriareal perspective prioritises variation in language use in the entire geospatial space where the language is spoken, constituting a dialect continuum which does not stop at national borders. It has been applied particularly to the German-speaking area, which, for example, shows variation in use which follows north-south as well as east-west borders that cross the national borders of Austria, Germany and Switzerland (e.g. Auer 2014, Pickl et al. 2019). In other words, a pluriareal approach puts emphasis on cultural (dialect) borders and regional centres rather than political (national) borders and national centres.

The pluriareal approach has not been without its critics. The focus on linguistic form – particularly on lexical similarities across a continuous area which traverses national borders – downplays the symbolic value of national standard varieties for expressing unity and shared social identity. The controversies over pluricentricity versus pluriareality have largely been confined to the domain of the German language, and it has been argued that the concept of pluriareality threatens how national standard varieties of German are valued and that the pluriareal approach adheres to an axiom of a single standard German (Dollinger 2019a, 2019b).

Leaving controversies aside, it is probably fair to say that researchers representing dominant varieties have been more occupied with variation per se, downplaying national difference, whereas those committed to non-dominant varieties have prioritised difference

from the dominant nation(s) in a bid to raise greater awareness of, and increased linguistic capital for their national varieties. Accordingly, there has been a call for *pluricentric linguistic justice* between varieties of pluricentric languages (Oakes & Peled 2017). Using French, and in particular Quebec French as their example, Oakes and Peled argue that pluricentric theory and practice need to move beyond empirical description in favour of an exploration into "the normative issues that transpire from the tension between a pluricentric reality and a monocentric ideology and consider possible policies that may be developed and applied in response to this tension" (Oakes & Peled 2017: 105). In particular, they discuss the emergence of Standard Quebec French and the challenges involved in justifying its existence, both in relation to English, the nationally dominant language in Canada, and Standard French in France as the dominant and "correct" norm, as well as local spoken varieties in Quebec.

3. Foundational work on pluricentric languages

Research on pluricentric languages can be traced back to the 1980s (e.g. Clyne 1985) and include both theoretical and empirical accounts of pluricentricity. A large body of the existing pluricentric work to date concerns the status of varieties, especially non-dominant varieties, evident in edited volumes such as Clyne (1992d), Muhr (2012b, 2016a, 2016b), Muhr et al. (2013, 2020), Muhr & Marley (2015), Muhr & Meisnizter (2018). Another theme dealt with in many studies on pluricentric languages is structural-linguistic differences between dominant and non-dominant varieties. The focus is typically on the non-dominant variety or varieties, describing what differences can be found on various levels of language compared to dominant varieties. For example, the seminal edited volume by Clyne (1992d) offers overviews of linguistic differences within pluricentric languages for most of the languages included. The focus in these overviews is mainly on phonology, morphology, syntax and lexis, but for some languages (e.g. Portuguese, Swedish, Korean) pragmatic differences are also commented on briefly.

The extent to which differences between dominant and non-dominant varieties have been explored and documented systematically varies between languages. For example, Portuguese comes forth as a very well-documented pluricentric language (cf. Baxter 1992). Phonological, morphological and lexical traits of some non-dominant varieties, such as Finland Swedish, have been documented systematically for a long time (cf. Ivars 2005; Reuter 2005) whereas non-dominant varieties of some much larger languages, such as German and French, have been documented less (cf. Clyne 1989, Lüdi 2012).

Much of the work of documenting features of pluricentric varieties has been carried out within the realm of language planning, which typically aims at addressing speakers of a particular language or even a particular (non-dominant) variety of that language on a national level. Such documentation may be difficult to access, not the least due to language obstacles. One of the main purposes of the 1992 volume on pluricentric languages was hence also to gather "comparative data on the situation of a representative selection of pluricentric languages throughout the world" (Clyne 1992a: 2). This has also been the purpose of the Working Group on Non-dominating Varieties of Puricentric Languages (NDV) established in 2010. The NDV network has organized conferences on an annual or biannual basis, which has resulted in several volumes documenting pluricentric languages, especially non-dominant varieties, from a number of perspectives (see references above). Among studies not dealing explicitly with the status of pluricentric varieties, comparisons of pronunciation and vocabulary dominate in the NDV volumes. Some studies analyzing syntactical features can be found, many of which concern Portuguese (e.g., Bazenga 2012, Duarte et al. 2018). In addition to this, there are some studies on the use of pronouns and terms of address

(Kretzenbacher et al. 2013, Henricson et al. 2015, Mendes et al. 2015) as well as a few dealing with discourse or interaction in a broader sense (e.g. Norrby et al. 2012).

Comparing pluricentric languages and varieties cross-linguistically is not a completely straight-forward task. Despite showing many similar features, each pluricentric language and pluricentric variety is embedded in a historical and societal context of its own. In some cases, comparisons between pluricentric languages and situations have, however, turned out to be feasible and fruitful. This is the case with, for example, the non-dominant varieties of Dutch spoken in Belgium (Flemish) and Swedish spoken in Finland (Finland Swedish). As shown by Bijvoet & Laureys (2001), Flemish and Finland Swedish share a number of features. Being spoken in bilingual countries both varieties make use of loan words from the other language spoken in the same country (French, Finnish). Archaisms and dialectal words and forms are more typical than in the dominant Dutch and Swedish varieties in the Netherlands and Sweden respectively. Speakers of Flemish and Finland Swedish also show a similar ambivalence towards the dominant variety and norm centre in the neighbouring country at the same time displaying tendencies of purism and hypercorrection.

While the pluricentric constellations in the Dutch- and Swedish-speaking areas (in Europe) are fairly similar and enable direct comparisons at various levels of language, the socio-historical and linguistic context of other pluricentric languages may look quite different. This is the case not the least with German, which is spoken in a larger number of countries than Dutch and Swedish, and in addition also displays a fair amount of variation within these countries. As discussed in section 2, some scholars have accordingly argued that German should be described as a pluriareal language rather than a pluricentric one. Nonetheless, studies have shown that some typical differing features can be found on a national level also for German, not only concerning levels such as pronunciation, morphology and vocabulary (Clyne 1992b), but also pragmatic levels of language use (Muhr 2008), including, for example, address patterns (Kretzenbacher & Schüpbach 2015).

4. Development of the field: from structural to pragmatic variation

As evident from the above, most research on pluricentric languages has focused on structural differences. In a bid to broaden the scope of research on pluricentric languages, *variational pragmatics*, first introduced by Anne Barron and Klaus P. Schneider in the mid-2000s, has been developed. Variational pragmatics is situated at the interface between pragmatics and variational linguistics (Schneider & Barron 2008a, 2008b: 1) and the aim is basically to 'dialectologize' pragmatics and 'pragmaticize' dialectology (Schneider 2010). Studies within this field typically focus on how different pragmatic routines and speech acts vary between varieties of a language (see e.g. Schneider & Barron 2008a and the contributions therein). As such, variational pragmatics could be seen as a sub-discipline of intercultural pragmatics, but rather than investigating pragmatic differences between languages, variational pragmatics highlights pragmatic variation within one and the same language.

In variational pragmatics, five levels of possible analysis are proposed: 1) *the formal level* (e.g. discourse particles and mitigators); 2) *the actional level* (the realisation and modification of speech acts); 3) *the interactional level* (how speech acts are combined into larger stretches of discourse, such as sequences and phases), 4) *the topic level* (e.g. topic selection and development, but also what topics are considered suitable in various social contexts), and 5) *the organisational level* (how pauses, overlaps and backchanneling cues are used). More recently, stylistic variation and non-verbal behaviour (e.g. prosody and bodily conduct) have been added to the list of levels for investigation of pragmatic variation (Schneider 2019).

Research on pluricentric languages is in general concerned with national varieties of a language, and treat geographical space in terms of nation. Within variational pragmatics geographical space is more often discussed in terms of region. While traditional dialectology has focussed mainly on describing regional variation within a nation, variational pragmatics treats region as a variable which can be examined across national borders and where national variation is subsumed under regional variation (Schneider & Barron 2008b: 17). In this respect, variational pragmatics is similar to the pluriareal approach where regional variation takes precedence over national variation.

Besides geographical space, variational pragmatics includes social space in its scope of inquiry. This enables a systematic investigation of the interrelationship between *macro-pragmatic* variation at the societal level, referring to different socio-historical developments between nations, and *micro-pragmatic* features of language interaction and use (cf. Muhr 2008). Social factors which may play a role in micro-pragmatic variation are, in addition to nation/region, aspects of age, gender, socio-economic status and ethnic identity. In much research on pluricentric languages, speakers of a national variety have been considered a homogenous group, and little importance has been given to inter-individual variation between speakers of a variety. In response to this, variational pragmatics sets out to "redress a traditional bias in cross-cultural and intercultural pragmatics which viewed languages implicitly as homogeneous wholes with macro-social variation largely abstracted away" (Barron 2015: 450).

In the early variational pragmatic work the focus was predominantly on regional (mostly national) variation rather than social variation (see e.g. Schneider & Barron 2008 and the contributions therein). However, macro-social factors, such as age and gender, form an important part in understanding more fully pragmatic variation between different data sets (see e.g. Schneider 2012). A study on address practises in the pluricentric languages English, German and Swedish (Clyne et al. 2009) showed how the choice of address forms is sensitive not only to the variable nation, but also that several other factors such as social distance, age, speaker status, domains and medium are equally important, thus problematizing the notion of nation in the study of pluricentric languages. Norrby et al. (2019) compared reported preferred introduction routines in first encounters at international conferences among speakers of American, Australian and British English. Overall, they found national variation with the American respondents favouring the most formal, and the Australians the most informal introductions with the British respondents in-between. However, all displayed similar situational sensitivities, preferring the least formal style when introducing oneself, and the most formal when introducing others. In addition, age/seniority and hierarchy were important factors for determining what style of introduction to use, suggesting that nation is only one variable among several that determine pragmatic variation.

In contrast to some pragmatic traditions, studies in variational pragmatics are firmly based on empirical data. Here, both experimental data, such as discourse completion tasks (Blum-Kulka et al. 1989), as well as naturally-occurring data, have been utilised. In the latter case, existing large electronic corpora of spoken discourse have been extensively used. Much of this research has been quantitative in nature, although qualitative studies also exist (Barron 2017), and often focus on the realisation of various speech acts such as requests, apologies, promises, thanking etc., across pluricentric varieties. A growing body of pragmatic research has taken an increasingly interactional perspective by studying how speech acts are combined in longer stretches at talk in data drawn from recordings of face-to face interactions in different contexts. Félix-Brasdefer (2015), for instance, investigated service interactions in Mexico and the USA with a focus on the organization of interactions between staff and customers, e.g. the opening and closing of exchanges, requests and responses (see also Placencia 2008, Félix-Brasdefer & Placencia 2019 and contributions therein).

5. Pluricentric Languages from the perspective of social interaction

As outlined in the previous section, variational pragmatics offers an avenue to compare pragmatic variation in pluricentric languages at various levels of discourse. Some studies have also focused more specifically on the sequentiality of real-time social interaction and deployed methods from Conversation Analysis (CA) and interactional (socio)linguistics. The basic tenet is that actions are sequentially organized through turn-taking and co-constructed by the participants. The central quest is to study how speakers understand and respond to the actions they produce in interaction with one another, and how and why participants make use of certain forms of action at a given point of talk. In the context of researching pluricentric languages, the analyst thus needs to operate on two levels: 1) focusing an interactional practice (e.g. the action of making a 'request') and the methods the participants use to produce a recognizable (or typical) action, and 2) identifying the macro-social meanings that are reflected by the forms of action that recur among the speakers of a variety.

Studies in this interactional vein suggest that varieties may differ in the way actions are sequenced. Using data from theatre box interactions, Lindström & Wide (2017) compared the sequencing of requests among Finland-Swedish and Sweden-Swedish customers. The Finland-Swedish customers tended to initiate the purchase with a pre-request concerning the availability of tickets (e.g. *Do you have tickets to Hamlet?*), formulating the proper request (e.g. *I would like to have two*) only after the salesperson had confirmed availability. In contrast, the Sweden Swedish customers favoured a request formulation in one turn, and thus a preference for a more direct interactional style. Flöck's (2016) study of requests in British and American English also suggests differences of this kind, as the British speakers in her data displayed a slightly higher preference for preparatory request strategies. As regards thanking sequences, we can note Grahn's (2017) study of Sweden-Swedish and Finland-Swedish doctor–patient interactions. Reciprocity in thanking was clearly preferred among the Sweden-Swedish participants, while the Finland-Swedish participants responded in various ways, not necessarily by returning a thank you. Such differences may affect the smoothness of communication in cross-variety interaction if a speaker of one variety experiences reciprocity in thanking being noticeably absent.

There are reports on differences in interactional style that go beyond sequencing of actions. Haugh (2017) compared mockery and (non-)seriousness in interactions between previously unacquainted Americans and Australians, and concluded that some differences seem to exist between American English and Australian English speakers in what is considered appropriate objects of jocular mockery. For example, it is suggested that ethnicity and race are usually not acceptable subjects for teasing and mockery among Americans, whereas there could be other problematic subjects among Australians.

Interactional style is also at issue in a study by Bergen et al. (2017) on British and American patients' resistance to doctors' treatment recommendations in primary care situations. They found differences between the two varieties of English in the patients' expectations of medical prescriptions: The British patients showed a resistance to recommendations for any treatment as well as tended to display an expectation of restricted prescription, whereas the American patients tended to resist recommendations for non-prescription treatment and display an expectation of prescription treatment.

In another study of similarities and differences between American English and British English, Reber (forthc.) examines the forms and functions of elliptical constructions deployed in the opening question–answer sequences of British and American post-match interviews,

and found that elliptical nominal constructions are much more common in the BrE data set. She discusses whether the preference for an elliptical style in the BrE post-match interviews is reflective of a higher routinization and affectivity of the genre in this culture, possibly pointing to a BrE rhetoric of praise compared to an AE "rhetoric of factual description" (Edwards 2000) in this genre.

Also, the way in which feedback tokens are produced may differ as shown by Henricson and Nelson (2017) in a study on giving and receiving advice in a higher education setting. They found that the Sweden Swedish students responded more often and in a more elaborate way to the academic supervisors' comments on a text assignment, whereas the feedback tokens produced by the Finland Swedish students were sparser. These observations seem to align with the findings by Lindström et al. (2019) on task-completing assessments in Swedish service encounters. The study reports that assessments in sequence closing third turns are a common feature of request–compliance sequences (viz. request–delivery–assessment). However, the speakers of the two national varieties of Swedish displayed different preferences for assessing: the Finland-Swedish customers predominantly assessed with low-grade terms (e.g. *good*) while the Sweden-Swedish customers tended to use high-grade assessments in the third turn (e.g. *super good*, *splendid*, *brilliant*). The cumulative evidence from a large number of service encounters thus suggest that the speakers from Sweden and Finland respectively operate on a different interactional metric in their assessment behavior.

Studies of the above kind demonstrate that systematic analyses of interactional routines in varieties of the same language in separate cultural settings can yield new insights into possible universal and culture specific patterns for communication and how these are mediated through linguistic means. Such an interactional perspective also draws our attention to the fact that "nation" or "region" do not affect speakers of those nations and places to speak in a certain way, but rather that the speakers of varieties in those places create and re-create pragmatic patterns together in interaction. In this manner, Conversation Analysis offers an orderly method for making discoveries of participants' micro-social conduct in real-world encounters (rather than reported usage), enabling a uniform scrutiny of the underlying norms regulating action formation. Future research will add to our understanding of these processes, possibly also involving other areas of social interaction than the participants' lexical and syntactic output. Prosody in conversation provides intriguing avenues of research for comparisons between varieties. For example, in a study on prosodic patterns in *other-repetition*, Couper-Kuhlen (forthc.) found some differences in how American English and British English speakers deploy prosody in the delivery of the repetition turn in expressing repair or unexpectedness. Differences may also surface in embodied conduct. Nilsson et al. (2017) report in a study of greeting sequences that, although sequentially identical, the duration and timing for mutual gaze in relation to the verbal greeting differed between the speakers of Finland Swedish and Sweden Swedish, respectively.

As in all fine-grained studies of social interaction, the challenge is to create an understanding of how tendencies in the micro-level of interaction are relevant for explaining differences in the macro-level socio-cultural contexts of a pluricentric language. The qualitative nature of conversation analytic methodology also poses a challenge for data sampling in a pluricentric framework. The researcher must pay attention to representativeness or possible skewings as regards the participants' age, gender and regional background.

6. Conclusion and Outlook

Research on pluricentricity has largely – as the name suggests – focused on varieties of languages that have the status as principal or official languages in at least two countries.

However, there has also been considerable work from a pluriareal perspective, where regional variation is the primary concern. This entails that the significance of concepts such as nation and national borders for variation are downplayed in favour of the import of regional variation, which can traverse national borders. In particular, pluriareality has been applied to situations of dialect continua, where the same word forms and vocabulary items are diffused over a larger continuous area irrespective of any national borders. A consequence of a pluriareal approach is, of course, that it also accounts for regional variation within a nation. As outlined above in section 2, a somewhat heated debate has been played out between the proponents of pluricentricity and those who advocate a plurialreal approach. Whatever the future holds with respect to this debate, it is probably fair to conclude that the argument to date mostly has been a concern of linguists from the German-speaking countries. The symbolic significance of standard national varieties as means for expressing unity and a shared socio-cultural identity is usually played down in pluriareal approaches. As a result, a certain lexical item may be the standard norm in one nation, but a non-standard, dialect form in another nation.

The different positions can also be traced back to the asymmetrical power relationships that exist between different varieties of pluricentric languages. A pluricentric language is often described in terms of dominance where there is a hierarchical ordering with one dominant variety, and one or several non-dominant varieties, with the dominant variety exerting more influence over the other varieties than vice versa. However, in reality the power relationships are often much more complex, and are a result of the particular historical and socio-cultural circumstances of each pluricentric language. For example, globally diffused languages, such as English or Spanish, are present in many national standard varieties where it is not possible to order these hierarchically with one national variety as the unquestioned dominant one. In post-colonial contexts a nativized variety may be used as a national language, and be assigned high status on the national linguistic market, while at the same time lacking such prestige on a global market. Generally speaking, there is also substantial internal variation within national varieties where individual speakers differ in their linguistic output. In short, a focus on standard national varieties by necessity emphasises commonalities at a fairly abstract level while downplaying the considerable variation that exists in concrete language use.

Much work on pluricentric languages to date concerns linguistic-structural differences between different national varieties. In particular, there has been a keen interest in documenting the structural characteristics of non-dominant varieties, and how they differ from dominant ones. The focus has typically been on language as a system, but more recently we have also seen a growing interest in pragmatic and interactional variation of pluricentric languages. Such a shift to include also aspects of language in use is beneficial to the pluricentric field at large, as it facilitates a fuller description of the differences (and similarities) found between different varieties. More importantly, however, such a shift in research focus also advances the pluricentric field theoretically and methodologically. Moving the object of inquiry from the macro-level of dominance hierarchies and status relationships between national varieties to the micro-level of interactional data, enables a detailed investigation of how participants express and respond to various social actions (e.g. requests, assessments, compliments, etc.) in actual communication. Such a micro-perspective is standard practice in interactional (socio)linguistics and conversation analysis, but when incorporating these theoretical frameworks into pluricentric research the challenge is to relate the micro-level variation between different national varieties to the macro-level social organisation of the respective communities. How members of a certain community (e.g. a nation) express and understand social actions, what they talk about and not, are also key to their overall normative sociocultural orientations. From this follows that micro-level analyses

of interactional data may advance our understanding of the sociocultural norms that are in place in the respective societies under investigation.

In terms of future development of the field, we are likely to see more research into the overall relationships between varieties of pluricentric languages. Recently there has been a call for investigations of pluricentric linguistic justice between standard national varieties of pluricentric languages. Many nations still operate according to a monocentric ideology of one nation – one language, but encounter a pluricentric reality within their borders. In the wake of globalisation and increased transnational mobility, intercultural and cross-cultural pragmatics might offer insights that will prove useful also for describing pluricentric relationships. The accumulated knowledge of structural, pragmatic and interactional differences between varieties of one and the same language may also be valuable for applied research in business, education, tourism and the service industry where speakers of different national varieties of a language are likely to come into contact.

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